

TUESDAY, JANUARY 22, 2013

**APPROVED MINUTES OF THE
DODGE COUNTY REGIONAL RAIL AUTHORITY
MEETING HELD**

**STATE OF MINNESOTA)
COUNTY OF DODGE)**

**COUNTY ADMINISTRATION OFFICE
MANTORVILLE, MN**

2013-01 Meeting

The Dodge County Regional Rail Authority met in regular session January 22, 2013, in the Commissioner's Room at the Courthouse Annex, Mantorville, MN, at 6:30 p.m. CST. County Administrator Jim Elmquist opened the meeting at 6:31 p.m. CST.

Meeting Convened

The pledge of allegiance was recited.

Pledge of Allegiance

The County Administrator acknowledged those present and established that there was a quorum:

Those Present

Members present:	John Allen	District #1
	Lyle Tjosaas	District #2
	Rodney Peterson	District #3
	David Erickson	District #4
	Steven Gray	District #5
Members absent:	None	
Also present:	Jim Elmquist	County Administrator

County Administrator Jim Elmquist took nominations for the position of Chair of the Dodge County Regional Railroad Authority. Commissioner Erickson nominated Commissioner Tjosaas. The County Administrator called three times for further nominations. Hearing none, the County Administrator closed nominations. Motion by Erickson seconded by Peterson to cast a unanimous ballot for Lyle Tjosaas as Chair of the Dodge County Regional Rail Authority for 2013. *Motion adopted unanimously.*

Commissioner
Tjosaas Elected
Chair for 2013

The meeting was turned over to the new Chair, Lyle Tjosaas.

Meeting Turned
Over to New Chair

Commissioner Tjosaas took nominations for the position of Vice Chair of the Dodge County Regional Railroad Authority. Commissioner Allen nominated Commissioner Erickson. Commissioner Tjosaas called three times for further nominations. Hearing none, the Chair closed nominations. Motion by Gray seconded by Peterson to cast a unanimous ballot for David Erickson as Vice Chair of the Dodge County Regional Railroad Authority for 2013. *Motion adopted unanimously.*

Commissioner
Erickson Elected
Vice Chair for 2013

Commissioner Tjosaas took nominations for the position of Secretary/Treasurer of the Dodge County Regional Railroad Authority. Commissioner Erickson nominated Commissioner Gray. The Chair called three times for further nominations. Hearing none, the Chair closed nominations. Motion by Allen seconded by Peterson to cast a unanimous ballot for Steven Gray as Secretary/Treasurer of the Dodge County Regional Railroad Authority for 2013. *Motion adopted unanimously.*

Commissioner Gray
Elected Secretary/
Treasurer for 2013

The Chair appointed County Administrator Jim Elmquist as the Clerk of the Dodge County Regional Railroad Authority.

Clerk Appointed

Motion by Erickson seconded by Peterson to approve and adopt the agenda as presented. *Motion adopted unanimously.*

Agenda Approved

Mr. Elmquist informed the Board that the previous Railroad Authority minutes had been approved at a regular board meeting in 2012.

2012 Meeting
Minutes Update

MnDOT employee Dave Christianson from the Office of Freight and Rail briefed the Rail Authority and the public on railroad projects affecting Dodge County.

Railroad Projects
Discussion

Freight Rail Study

Mr. Christianson updated the Authority on the SE Minnesota Rail Capacity Study which is also known as the Rochester Freight Rail Bypass. The scope of the study is to evaluate the capacity of rail through Rochester on the current and proposed routes identified. The study is about ¾ of the way through and staff has conducted two open houses. There is another open house in Rochester on Monday, January 28th at 5:00 p.m. at the Rochester Event Center. The conclusion of the study is fairly soon. Staff is modeling scenarios of at the least four trains a day but in all actuality there are about two trains currently using the track. The upper threshold is a 39 trains per day scenario which is based on the original Environmental Impact Study (EIS) done by DM&E some time ago for the maximum amount of coal trains along with freight traffic. Additional modeling is being done to overlay passenger trains wherever there would be a “common impact” which would be the area known as Highway 52 to Broadway in Rochester. The next open house and Policy Advisory Commission (PAC) Meeting will discuss the effects of interactions between freight and rail and causes for overpasses or elevated tracks.

The fourth phase of the study will look at all the alternatives, cost structures, impacts, and determine mitigation techniques up to and including the bypass solution. The interactions will also be outlined further. However, with Canadian Pacific’s leadership change and with the transformation of the fuel industry going to natural gas, there has been a change in the picture of this rail line. With up to 20% of coal plants converting to natural gas it is putting a lid on the coal traffic in the area. The need for the coal line has basically disappeared. The study will provide for thresholds into the future and without an increase in demand for train traffic from the current use, the study will be shelved and will render any change in systems useless at this time.

There was a question as to whether or not there will be a sand need on the rail.

Mr. Christianson stated that the majority of sand being transported comes out of Wisconsin due to their sand quality, therefore the demand on Minnesota’s sand is considerably less. It was noted that the Saint Charles plant should also have no effect on Rochester rail traffic due to its routing.

Mr. Christianson reported that initial cost estimates state that once the rail line reaches three grade crossing requirements where the road is raised, it would be cheaper to have an entire rail line elevation. Mr. Christianson used Fort Wayne, Indiana as an example of where there has been elevation success where it has a 2.5 mile line extending over all of the major roadways in the area. That is a consideration in this study.

Railroad Projects
Discussion -
Continued

Zip Rail

The study is intended to be an 18-month project and MnDOT and the consultants are three months into the process. More time will be needed before project reviews for a PAC or Technical Advisory Commission (TAC) is necessary. At this point, locations are being determined and paperwork completed to prepare for an EIS. The end points are Rochester on the south and the airport grounds in the Twin Cities on the north. The river-crossing going into the Twin Cities is a major challenge but a report was presented by MnDOT to Olmsted County that they may have a solution to that issue. Mr. Christianson did say there is not enough room on the Highway 52 corridor for it to be one of the alignments due to the gradients and curvature. The existing lines, if considered, would mean it would have to go from Rosemount to Northfield on freight lines which would give access to the Union Pacific Rail-line. The Rochester Airport to Twin Cities Airport connection that has been reported in the past is not going to produce enough revenue to be a viable option.

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) will be the lead agency. The FRA will be reviewing all aspects of the project allowing for an expedited ruling upon completion of the project if funding is available. It would allow for them to make a record of decision. There is a lot of work for the consultants in the next fifteen months.

There was a question as to what the assumptions were in the study. Zip rail is designed for a high speed, cross-country passenger. There would be ten round trips a day with a maximum speed up to 225 mpg and a minimum of 125 mpg. It will be a question of resources to determine the best efforts to accomplish how tracks would be built. It would require a dedicated corridor with no hubs because it would not allow for a high speed capacity if it requires stops.

There was a question about the Central Corridor in the Twin Cities. It will be up and running in the spring or summer of 2014. There are two switches still needing to be installed along with the entire signal system as well. Ramsey County is the project lead. "Trackage" and signal agreements still need to be reached with other rail systems affected in the area. Once the project is completed, all destination points intended for passenger rail in the Twin Cities will be tied together.

Public comment was taken from the audience.

Kathy King wanted to know how Rochester has indicated concern about mitigated traffic needs and what will trigger them to do any mitigation in the future.

Mr. Christianson said it will be the actual traffic increases occurring from the freight that would trigger future mitigation.

Ms. King also asked about how mitigation requirements usually result in their statement of need for a bypass and what will prevent this from being the default in the future.

Railroad Projects
Discussion -
Continued

Mr. Christianson stated that a bypass will be multi-hundred million dollar project versus a grade-separation alternative which is a ten-twenty million dollar project.

Jim Checkel stated that Dodge County Commissioners have represented residents well in the past on this issue and he hopes the new commissioners will feel the same way about the rail issues.

Mark Moenning wanted to know what warrants the elevated rail being funded.

Mr. Christianson said it would be the increased demand of rail traffic supporting the need.

It was also questioned if the little traffic currently supports the use of the line.

Mr. Christianson said that traffic does support the rail usage due to business use. Rail companies also know that lines are difficult to expand without laying new track and therefore, will not be letting current lines go.

Mr. Moenning asked about using freight “trackage” for passenger rail and if it’s viable to use.

Mr. Christianson said it has proven worthwhile in Europe. If there is a necessity to go into the Union Depot Line, it will need to use existing line once it reaches Northfield. This will all be determined within the study relative to line-work determination.

Mr. Moenning also asked about the priorities of dictating viability of a passenger route.

Mr. Christianson said that ridership is the number one criteria for service; second is speed of service; and third is where the alignment is. This particular line has a fair possibility of paying for itself which is the cost of operation and maintenance and not the actual capital cost of building.

Mr. Moenning also asked about interconnectivity and how important that is.

Mr. Christianson stated that interconnectivity is integral for the long-term success of the line. Lines requiring less connection by bus or car is desired because it drives ridership. Twenty to forty percent of the ridership would likely be dependent on inter-connections for use.

John Meyer asked about a passenger line coming into Northwest Rochester and if it would exclude Dodge County if this were the case.

Mr. Christianson said he could not say at this time.

Mr. Meyer also asked if there would be a need for parking in Rochester to allow for the use of the passenger line.

Mr. Christianson said that parking would be built into the study.

Railroad Projects
Discussion -
Continued

Mr. Meyer wanted to know what effect this will have on the Rochester airport.

Mr. Christianson said that the major portion of traffic at that airport is airfreight. Mayo takes 30,000 lab samples a day and without the airport, Mayo could not do the international service they perform.

Steve Gray asked about the reference to Zip Rail in the freight study purpose and need statement and the belief that there was no mention of it.

Mr. Christianson stated the scope does reference it albeit, brief.

After no further public comment, Commissioner Tjosaas thanked Mr. Christianson and the audience for their participation.

Motion by Allen seconded by Gray to adjourn the meeting at 7:45 p.m. CST.
Motion adopted unanimously.

Meeting Adjourned

ATTEST:

LYLE TJOSAAS
CHAIR, REGIONAL RAIL AUTHORITY

JIM ELMQUIST
CLERK

DATED: